Couldn't Believe It When She Heard

Tilda glimpses the woman as she rises, on reaching her stop: the one before Tilda's own. A flash of blonde curls, crimson lipstick, cream blouse, and navy fitted trousers, and she disappears.

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Tilda clutches her latest purchase in a Virgin Megastore carrier bag. It is 1995, and she is the proud owner of yet another Now album. She opens a side compartment of her black leather handbag, managing to cram her newest CD in.

Two women, seated directly behind Tilda, are talking, their conversation punctuated by unapologetically loud laughter. Opinions on work colleagues and news about mutual acquaintances.

Then one says to her friend: "So, is it true about you and Dan?"

The name Dan registers, because that is also the name of Tilda's boyfriend of almost a year. Or the guy she has been seeing, at least. "Boyfriend" might be optimistic.

Details emerge. The Red Lion, for starters. It is him. It has to be.

"But how about the girlfriend?"

" Oh, I know, Wendy. She's only about twenty-three. I couldn't believe it, when I heard. Apparently, she is just very dependent on him. "

Tilda wants to scream: "Twenty-two, actually!" As though that is the important aspect, somehow. But the woman then adds that Tilda is "really pretty, apparently". The "apparently" clause again. Tilda doesn't somehow want to reveal her "end of a long day at the office" look, complete with uncombed hair. So, she remains silent. That is where it ends.